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## THE COMPULSORY SYSTEM IN THE GERMAN EMPIRE <sup>1</sup>

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MUCH has already been written and discussed regarding the compulsory military system in the German Empire, and no doubt many of you are familiar with various phases of it. My object is merely to present to you the routine organization, which takes the German young man at the age of twenty, proceeds to train him as a soldier, and exercises a certain control over him, in a military sense for the benefit of the nation, until he is forty-five years old.

A short historical summary of the causes, which led to the adoption, or rather the development, of the universal compulsory system in Germany may be of interest. After Napoleon I had conquered nearly all of Europe and incidentally shattered the old Prussian army, General Scharnhorst conceived the idea of placing the entire population capable of bearing arms under a military regime. The fundamental basis of General Scharnhorst's idea was naturally to free Germany from the burden of the French yoke. According to the stipulations in the treaty of peace with the French in the year 1806, it was agreed that the standing Prussian army should not exceed 40,000 men at any one time. With these arbitrary restrictions in mind, General Scharnhorst, who already had the nucleus or skeleton of an army available, undertook to train the entire populace into a military force, and he did so by giving a severe intensive training, lasting several months, to the 40,000 men called for service. As soon as that number was sufficiently trained, these men returned to their fields of home endeavor, and a new batch of recruits were summoned and trained. In this way his standing army never exceeded

<sup>1</sup> An address delivered at the afternoon meeting of the Academy of Political Science, May 18, 1916.

40,000 men and through the interchanging process gradually the entire population was thoroughly grounded in military service.

Thus we can almost assume that the German military system was due to, and made possible by, the restrictions imposed upon the Germans by the French at the treaty of 1806. By the development of this military system, the successful termination of the War of Liberation in 1813 was assured. The soldiers who had served their term in the aforesaid army of 40,000, when retired to make room for a new levy, were thereupon called the *Prussian Landwehr*, and we may almost say became the backbone of the army. In fact public opinion in Prussia voiced its sentiment in approval of the continuation of General Scharnhorst's idea, and the military scheme was more carefully organized and developed. The other separate states of Germany soon recognized the value of the Prussian system and adopted it in the years following.

The three and four years' service required by this method of compulsory military service placed rather a heavy burden upon the people. The terms were too long, and the men called to the colors were absent from their agricultural and mercantile pursuits for so long a time, that finally the economic conditions of the country suffered.

Gradually also the improved conditions in social life brought greater rewards than did a military life. It was therefore necessary to carefully study the best needs of the nation as well as of the individual, to produce the best possible conditions in the interest of a sound economic national existence, and also to provide an efficient and capable military establishment so vital and necessary.

A limited period of training of, for instance, two or three years, had proven sufficient to make a good soldier out of the average citizen.

One of the strongest bulwarks of a good military system is an unfailing reserve force of non-commissioned officers. To those to whom the military service was agreeable and who desired to continue in the army after absolving their two years' period, an opportunity was given to enable them to remain

for longer periods. Their development and training there-upon was such as to give assurance that upon their return to private life, they would be equipped with an education which would be of value to them in their future civil career.

In time of peace the standing army of modern Germany approximates only 1% of the total population. The figure varies but a small fraction of 1%. The Reichstag stipulates the number of troops required in times of peace and controls the appropriation of the necessary funds. The standing army has never exceeded, as a matter of fact,  $1\frac{1}{2}\%$  of the total population, as, for instance, in the summer of 1914, the standing army amounted to 1.117%.

The above figures will readily demonstrate that from 30 to 40% of the available male population capable of carrying arms was never called for military service.

The German citizen is liable for military service beginning with his twentieth year and continues so until he has passed his forty-fifth year. Once every year, from his twentieth birthday on, the German citizen must appear before a local military "Kommandant" of his district for control. According to the military requirements of the nation, the available men who are not drafted for military service, 30 to 40% of the total, are always subject to service in the reserve.

Owing to the surplus of available recruits, the greatest care is exercised in the selection of the men. Physical characteristics are predominantly considered, but concessions are always possible on account of educational motives or family dependence. In fact the human equation always plays a prominent part in the selection of men for military service.

The German military force of today consists of the so-called *regular army* and the *landsturm*. The "regular army" consists of the active standing army and the *landwehr*. The standing army is divided into two branches: the active and the reserve forces. The active army is composed of men capable of military service, beginning at the age of twenty, who serve two years, with the exception of the cavalry and parts of the field artillery, who serve three years. After the two or three years of actual service the soldier is delegated to the reserve.

The reserve forces consist of soldiers who have served the prescribed two or three years and who thereafter for four or five years serve a period of training of from four to six weeks every few years, according to whatever branch of military service they are incorporated. After a soldier has served in the standing army, including service in the active as well as reserve forces, he is automatically transferred to the *landwehr*, in which he remains for five years. In times of necessity, the *landwehr* is liable to a call to the colors.

In summarizing the foregoing, you will note that the German citizen who enters the military service at the age of twenty has by this time usually reached the age of thirty-two years, his twelve years of military service being divided as follows: two years in the active forces, five years in the reserve, five years in the *landwehr*. Occasionally parts of the *landwehr* are called upon to undergo a special fortnightly-term of service, usually in connection with special maneuvers. After absolving his *landwehr* period and until he is forty-five years of age, the German citizen belongs to the *landsturm*, which is again divided into two branches: Those who have served and were trained, and those who were not drafted owing to the reasons given before.

Mention should also be made of a certain group of the last form, which includes the youths of from seventeen to twenty years of age, who, however, are not called for service in ordinary times. It may be added here, that special consideration is given the young men, who started to learn various trades and professions, before they entered their first period of service in the army. Their assignments to the various regiments are always made from a double standpoint.

In a well-organized regiment, it is essential to have representatives of the various trades included in the personnel, which assures a better organization and independence of the regiment as a complete unit. The other advantage of this system of selection is that it enables a recruit to develop his chosen trade, so that when he retires to civil life again he will have the additional benefit of a thorough training in his chosen work as well as having become a good soldier. For

instance, after three years service in a cavalry regiment as a farrier, the soldier receives a certificate, which practically assures him a good position in civil life as the result of the training he has received in that branch while in the army. The same applies to tailors, bakers, carpenters and so on.

For those to whom the military life is agreeable, particularly non-commissioned officers, as mentioned before, special courses of instruction are available to enable them to develop still further in their military career as well as in general education. Lessons and lectures are provided for the study of languages, mathematics, geography, etc. When they desire to retire into civil life to positions in the postal or railway or revenue services, preference is given. After twelve years of faithful service, a premium of 1,000 Marks is given to enable them to start independently in business in civil life.

We now come to the men of whom you no doubt have heard as *Einjaehrige* or one year's service men. This institution is of great importance from a practical as well as a military standpoint. It originated at the time when the army was not yet large enough to accommodate all eligible men, and recruits were drawn by lot. In order to enjoy the rights of a one-year service man, a young man has to provide his equipment, and receives no pay to support himself. Likewise proof must be given of a superior education, by means of school testimonials or on the basis of a rather severe examination. The one-year voluntary service, then, is in no sense a privilege of wealth, but rather a privilege of education, for whereas the examination may never be remitted, assistance is given to young men of superior education or exceptional ability in their trade who lack the means for supporting themselves throughout the entire year.

The one-year service, which was introduced by Minister of War von Boyen in 1814, together with the duty of general military service, has two striking advantages. In the first place, military service for only one year interrupts but slightly the general training of the young Germans. On the contrary, it is regarded by many as a great advantage that young men, whether merchants, students or farmers, interrupt once in

their life their civil employment and become familiar with an entirely new world. In the second place, these one-year service men provide the indispensable material for replenishing the body of officers in time of need. After one year of service has rendered the sifting possible, the superiors select those suitable for the position of officers, who are then called to the colors twice for a period of eight weeks, thoroughly trained, and become eligible for a commission as officers. In the event of mobilization, these reserve and *landwehr* officers are intermingled with the regular officers in such a manner that a great number of reserve officers are drawn into the line regiments while regular officers are assigned to the reserve and *landwehr* regiments, especially in positions of command. Acquaintance with officers' corps in time of war shows that a large proportion of them are judges, state's attorneys, teachers, professors, artists, writers, farmers, merchants, engineers and officials of all kinds.

The military spirit in the German army is chiefly represented in its corps of officers and the education which they impart to the youth of the land.

When the decision is reached by the German youth who desires to embrace the military career as a life's work, he makes application, when becoming of military age, to the colonel of the regiment he intends to join. The choice of selecting the branch of service, and the particular regiment is open to the candidate. If the applicant possesses the necessary qualities, mentally, physically and morally, in a degree sufficient to appeal to the regimental commander, he is accepted and enters the regiment as a private, where he does the same work as the other privates, but in addition thereto must practise and study for his profession. After one year's service in the ranks he is sent to the "Kriegsschule" or "Military Academy", where he spend nine months in patient application to military studies.

Thereupon he takes an examination to show his eligibility to become an officer. If he has successfully passed this examination he is proposed for admission by the regiment's officers and, to be acceptable, must receive an unanimous

vote in his favor. Before being admitted to the officer's rank, the facts are placed before the Emperor, who thereupon presents to the office his commission.

As to the broad aspects of compulsory military service, with reference to its advantages to the individual as well as as to the nation, it is universally conceded that the two years' military service is of great benefit. It broadens and educates; it gives mental and moral support; it provides a physical foundation of a superior order; and, last but not least, it inculcates the highly desirous disciplinary features, which have proven to be so necessary. In peace times, the same moral force has been a powerful factor in instituting social reforms.

Contrary to general belief a two years' military service does not imply any disadvantage whatsoever in a country where every male individual is placed under the same obligations and where preference in any industrial pursuit as well as in social life is visible to the man who has served his country faithfully.

In conclusion, I quote from a leading military authority of the present period, Major Deutmoser. In a statement written several years before the present war, he characterized the ideals and achievements of true military training as follows:

"An army fit for war is not a great machine in which, if it is properly constructed throughout, the motive power proceeds from one point and by automatic compulsion sets the most distant wheels in operation. Each element of which an army is composed is an individual being, has its own world of thoughts and feelings, with an individual will, which may just as easily express itself against the operation of the whole as in agreement with it. Herein lies the principal difficulty in the leading of great masses. If the highest plane of agreement is to be reached, it is needful that the many thousands act together, not under mechanical compulsion, but as independently thinking and willing units. Formerly this was quite different from today, since the close rank formations of the past left but slight latitude for the individual. King



Frederick's Grenadiers fought shoulder to shoulder, closely knit in serried ranks. The battle formation of present-day infantry fighting, on the contrary, is that of the deployed firing line.

"Thus the individual, at the very moment when brought face to face with the immediate danger of death, is deprived of the influence of the word of command. He must furthermore, seek cover in order to offer the smallest possible target to the enemy. As a result, he disappears from the supervising eye of the leader more than might be desired and he is in a higher degree left to himself. The danger is herewith created that the expediency and uniformity of the action be lost, and that the will to victory give way to the consciousness of the continuing presence of death, calculated to undermine the morale. There is but one counter measure for this: to so develop in each man in time of peace the independent power of decision so that he may know how to act correctly without any constant direction, and above all to train him to honorable feelings and strength of will which under the stress of necessity and danger by their own force overcome the instinct of self-preservation."

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